

THE CHRISTIAN THEATRE.

A sermon preached by Edward Mason, at Farmersville, Ohio, December 9th, 1883.

TEXT:—"Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children."

The word *mimētai*, which has been translated "followers," signifies such as personate others, imitators, those who strive to resemble. This is done by assuming the gait, mode of speech, and in fact, the general peculiarities of another whom we desire to represent, such as actors do on the stage when they personate other characters. It is from this Greek word that our English word *mimic* is derived. Though the term is often used in a ludicrous sense, yet it is here employed in a very solemn and substantial sense. In these early days of Christianity, the Christian life was often compared to the public games and sports. The Ephesians were well acquainted with the theatre, and the duties of actors of the actors. Therefore, Paul, with his usual common-sense manner of teaching, used similes that would best be understood by those whom he was talking or writing. Therefore with such a precedent we will at once plunge into our subject, and under the blessing of God, endeavor to arrive at its full meaning.

We will first notice that this acting element enters into all human life. Man's outward actions are but interpretations, more or less correct, of the inward operations of the soul. The body in every look, attitude or gesture personates the soul. What do we know of thought only as it is expressed in words? What do we know of principle only as it is played in character? We are never still. We are continually acting out our true nature. It is by these actions that we manifest what we are.

Then, again, we notice that the imitative element enters into all human life. We are all creatures of imitation. There is but little, if any, originality about man. We borrow from past generations. The capital we receive from our fathers, we hand over to our children with probably a little interest. Every person has his ideal, which he imitates as personates through life, and it is very necessary that our models should be noble and pure. We are the architects of our own character and destiny. Our companions, surrounding education, and even the very literary read, have a great deal to do in moulding our natures. The young readers of the *Century*, *Immortal* stuff, with which the world is flooded, find their ideal in the heroes, heroines of these demoralizing books. evil deeds of men are surrounded with a glory, and sin and vice is so gilded over the young mind is deceived, and its blindness is hidden from view. The vicious actions of bad men are so depicted to make them attractive, and in a these kind of characters become their minds. The general manner, these kind of models are imitated in country with outlaws and vagabonds, our penitentiaries with thieves and rogues. How careful should the fathers and mothers of America be in choosing reading material for their children.

Our text tells us who we are to imitate. We should have a model that was immaculate. No matter how good and great a man may become, he will surely have some failings and weaknesses. So peculiar is our nature that we almost invariably imitate the weaknesses of those whom we consider great, so that it is really unsafe to take man as our great model. Paul says, "Be ye imitators of God." Now what do we know of God? How can we imitate God? Who has penetrated into the heavens and seen God that he can personate him on earth? He is so far above our conception that we literally know nothing of him. Before the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, it would have been impossible for man to obey this injunction. This is the immensity of God's love, that in the fullness of time he came to rescue man. He came as an example. Eighteen centuries ago Jesus said: "Follow me." That invitation has been echoed and re-echoed ever since. He did not merely say, "Do this, or do that," but, "do as I have done—follow me." He never asks us to do what he never did himself. We must imitate him. This, then, is our great model whom we are to personate. In following Jesus we follow God, because he and the Father are one.

Having given us the model, Paul calls upon the sons of men to act a part in this great drama of Christian life. The question may be asked, who are to be the actors, and to whom is the Apostle writing? Believers in Christ undoubtedly are the persons referred to. If any others act this part, then they are hypocrites. Paul regarded every Christian in the capacity of an actor. To be a good actor we should study thoroughly the character we are to represent. We cannot personate a character we do not know. We cannot know

the motive and object of the character we are to represent. The manner of effect and influence on others, overlooked. We are, in fact, to be represented as poor actors. No person can personate another against whom he is prejudiced. In observing this character we wipe our spectacles clean. Secularism is the great curse of modern times. Neither must we take a partial view of this great model. It is the manner of studying the life of Christ that produces so many lop-sided Christians. We mean those who go staggering through life unbalanced. A great many people have been misled by the doctrines of the peculiar sect. They belong to the sect of the love for creatures. This makes their course very zigzag. All men generally carry selfishness on one shoulder and love on the other. The selfishness is often so great and so insignificant that the character becomes so deformed. Some Christians imitate our Savior in the outward ornaments of the church; to his life of love and to his life of suffering. The latter is the important as it is the fruit of Christianity. By this fruit that the world judges of our religion. We should also the spirit of the character we personate acting will be a failure. We must have an object and motive as our great model. Love should be the ruling power.

theatre in which this great moral drama is enacted is the church. By the church we do not refer merely to a local organization, but to that which men are called by the gospel. The church is within the social world. The church is distinct from the city so also distinct from the world. Among the ancient eastern cities, the remains of the amphitheatre is very prominent, that they occupied a very conspicuous and important position. This is how it should be with the church. Its entrance is very wide—wide enough to permit the sinner to enter, yet too narrow for the proud. It is also very capacious. It is wide enough to contain all those that believe in the Lord Jesus throughout all the world. "And still there is room" for more from heaven to earth. The doors of admission must not be forgotten. The magnanimity of the Master, who gave money and without price, we must remember. Thus the poor as well as the rich are admitted. And who are the angels and the messengers of the Lord, and severely criticize watch our every word but one misstep they will lose all of gratification. The church should look on with sympathy to the enemies of the church, and then be circumspect in giving the enemies of the church to rejoice, or make our grief for our inconsistency.

WORK BEFORE US.

BY J. H. WORST.

While there may be those who imagine that the work of reformation was completed when the Brethren throttled the tyrant tradition and crowned the pure gospel of Christ as "all in all," yet the more far-seeing ones know better. The work has just begun. The church of Christ never stood in need of busier hands and brains than now. We have righteously hurled back to Satan his rubbish, and now comes the pleasing task of demonstrating the superiority of the "gospel alone" as a guide in all things pertaining to salvation.

Christ's system is best only so far as it is superior in making men and women better than some annual meeting system, or a system made by uninspired men. The tree must be judged by its fruits henceforth. I was happy to observe that the Brethren at South Waterloo, Iowa, had organized a number of prayer meetings, as they said, "to keep the members busy; to give them something to do." They have observed that if "an empty head is the devil's workshop," an idle church may be the devil's metropolis. As far back as we can remember the average church member had nothing to do but attend church when the weather permitted, and get his charges ready in the meantime for the next visit, which meant another mean time at the quarterly council that always followed. But we digress, as this was not according to the Gospel of Christ, but according to the "minutes" and we had no right to expect anything better. A fountain cannot rise above its head, and if it has a human head it will not have to rise much. At least there was not much encouragement to rise above a formality that bore human ear marks and a passive submission to

the will of the flesh, and often not of your own flesh, either.

Now the gospel leads in a different direction; it leads upwards. Its work is tangible and perceivable. It makes men "peculiar—zealous of good works," while its counterfeit contemporary makes men "peculiar"—i. e., somewhat oddly attired. Mark the difference. See which is most kindly disposed, most unselfish, and most zealous in assisting the great influence of the age for the good of men. In marking this difference, please do not look for it as manifested between men of kindred spirits, because even lions are kind to each other; but look at it as manifested between spirits that are not kindred—made so by the power of traditions.

Ask for a meeting house in which to preach the unadulterated word of God; ask for an equitable division of church property your money helped make; and then ask that baptism be recognized as valid when administered just as Christ directed, and note the answer.

The one will say certainly, that is what the house was built for, while the other will bolt the door. Question: Which manifests the spirit of Christ?

To the second proposition, one says, you can certainly have the use of the house if you will alternate with us in using it; the other says, no sir, though you paid half or two thirds of the money necessary to build it, you can't have the use of it except for funerals.

To the third, one says, yes, if baptism is administered as Christ directed, it is valid; the other says no, it is not valid unless administered as Christ directed, and by a regularly authorized minister of the church.

Just see. Now we do not record these facts to show how we are persecuted, but to show the difference of the fruit grown on different trees. If the fruit of the creed tree be dishonesty, selfishness, bigotry, &c., the tree ought to be grubbed out. If the fruit of the gospel tree is better it ought to be encouraged. If the tree bears no fruit—but it always does.

Now, the great work before us is to heal up the welts and scars made by the old yoke. The yoke rested pretty hard on active charity, spirituality, and christian courtesy, so much so that their vitality is about destroyed, while the gospel yoke which should have rested upon selfishness, egotism, and dogmatism, was hung upon the other end, and hence, its mission was made void. "Faith without works is dead, being alone." The works necessary, however, to constitute a living faith are not simply to observe the ordinance of feet-washing, the Lord's Supper, Salutation, &c., as is generally preached. They are to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, do good, &c. See James 2: 15, 17. All have a work to do and now is the time to do it. If the young ladies are invited to engage in some department of church work they will do a vast amount of good; if not, they will be tempted while forced to be idle, to bang their hair and grow more in fashion than in grace. But whose fault will it be? Manifestly the fault of those who will not encourage them to work, and commit the greater wrong by growling at them, tattling and gossiping about them. If the good sisters of mature age will take the matter in hand and move just as the gospel directs them, there will be no criminal superfluity of dress among the young sisters. If the brethren do the same with the young men, they will all be sober, earnest, christian workers.

Under any other than the gospel system, some of the outward superfluities might be wrenched off a little more expeditiously, but the harm done would be tenfold greater than the benefit sought. The harm would come to both the offender and the offended. It would pierce the very heart of the offender, and also make a coarse, hard hearted, busybody of the offended.

The trouble is the gospel method is not understood because not thoroughly studied. Study it. You will find there a remedy that will cure every defect, instead of snipping it off as a wart with a pincers, to bleed a while, get sore, then grow much broader than before if not quite so high.

Give all the members some work to do. Encourage them to work. Make them feel that they each have an individual work to perform that is vital to the prosperity of the church. Elders can afford to divide the honors. They have much to do, but not nearly all of it. When all get to working "with God," there will be no idle elders hunting notoriety, no charges against members, no drones; but all superfluities, all criminal indulgences, all wrong doings will be reformed, cured, healed, as a part of the church work which is according to the gospel and will of God, and is preferable to turning them over to the devil for reformation. A church that cannot reform its evil doers without the assistance of Satan as its nurse and physician looks very human externally and internally. Who

would not rather belong to a system that wholly discards the company and assistance of Satan.

ANOTHER ABUSE THAT MUST BE AVOIDED.

BY W. J. H. BOWMAN.

I am much pleased with brother P. J. Brown's pointed article, in No. 49 of *BRETHREN'S EVANGELIST*. The article is rendered so unselfishly, and yet so telling.

The abuse we have reference to in this article refers to our tendency to "soft soap" unrealities. The German Baptists and the "Brethren" are to all intents and purpose two distinct organizations, in the Christian world, and it is a fearful abuse of our obligations toward the outside world, not to recognize that fact. Do we expect people to blindly rush into the church in our efforts to persuade them to unite with us? If so, we decidedly place too low an estimate upon the intelligence of the age and country we live in.

Unprejudiced minds think for themselves and propose to choose their own leaders. Paul urges the necessity of giving our trumpet a CERTAIN sound. This "milk and water" policy tends to leave people in the dark. In joining a church they desire to know, and ought to know what they are doing; what church they are joining.

We have people in our county who could not be induced to unite with the German Baptist church, and there may be some who would prefer their fellowship, but not that of the "Brethren." In our immediate vicinity (Brown County, Kansas) there are German Baptist ministers who, for effect, upon uninformed minds are now parading, apparently in a spirit of exultation, the "Brethren's" motto: "The gospel, the whole gospel, and nothing but the gospel," and in all candor they ought to be ashamed of themselves, while keeping the Brethren at arms length. We desire to say to our brethren, that whilst we should treat them with Christian courtesy, by attending their meetings, and in every other respect, we should avoid being partakers of their sins, in thus deceiving the public. We should, nay we must, let the public know the difference between us. However unpleasant such a labor may be to us, it is all the same OUR DUTY. In their past expulsions in this county, they acted (they themselves will testify to the fact) upon other than gospel grounds, and shall we permit and even assist them now in "whitewashing" this fact before the outside world? They say "There is so much trouble in the church." I presume they speak the truth; but, brethren, are we participants in that trouble, when in the "Brethren" Church, (at least in this vicinity) there is at this time at least, nothing found but love enthroned upon Christian truth and affection. We may do so unconsciously, but brethren, as it was said of Ephraim: "He is joined to his idols, let him alone," so we should say to our German Baptist brethren, and herald forth the TRUTH to the world, as to the relative positions occupied by us and the German Baptists. We and they are no nearer one and the same church, than we and the Methodists are. The one may have more of the form, but I honestly believe that the other has more of the spirit of Godliness. Brethren, in order to success this abuse of our own and the rights of others must be avoided. By not avoiding it we become a reproach and laughing stock before the world, and instead of gaining men to Christ we'll be the means, by our inconsistent "milk and water" policy, to drive them into the ranks of Ingersoll, Beecher, &c., &c.

If the "order" and "mandates of Annual Meeting" are God, serve it and them. On the other hand, if the gospel is sufficient, take it for your guide; but whichever way you may choose be consistent. Men who use the Brethren's motto ought to break that "Jockey stick," and prove their faith by their works. O how inconsistent, to be ashamed or afraid to define our position, and to defend our creed. We unhesitatingly affirm that the creed adopted by the Brethren needs neither revision, nor the seal of any conference, and with shame should blush the man who dares to uphold such a privilege for a human conference.

"Precious Bible how I love thee,"

Morrill, Kans.

MUSINGS.—NO. 1.

BY J. W. SMOUSE.

Sn rolls its warm, sparkling, but poisonous current through the veins of all. Man everywhere is in moral ruin. "From the crown of his head to the sole of his foot," &c. Humanity is in a sad condition. Instead of navigating the sea of life with truth for its guiding-star and heaven for its destination, it is lying in ruins amid rocks and sands. In musing upon the desolation of humanity our ears are greeted with the invitation: "Come unto me and live." The earnestness of God for man's recovery is fully expressed in the gift of his